

Blown Away on the Flight Deck

By AME1(AW/SW) Brian McKinzie

50% Mishap Reduction Opportunity

Exhaust Damage and Injuries, FY99-03

The Naval Safety Center database shows 16 aircraft damaged and four people blown down or overboard in the last five years (we suspect some events go unreported). Two aircraft had Class A damage, and the total damage cost was \$2,788,345.

Type-aircraft breakdown:


FA-18	5
E-2	2
P-3	1
E-6	1
H-60	1
EA-6	1
F-14	1
S-3	1
C-130	1
AH-1	1
AV-8	1

Aircrew, maintainers and yellowshirts must make sure aircraft are clear of destructive jet exhaust, prop wash, and rotor down wash. Flight-deck personnel must maintain SA to avoid swimming with the fishes.

It was another night on the flight deck, nothing out of the ordinary. We had one aircraft land and taxi toward the bow for a hot pump and crew switch. The yellowshirts parked that jet so the exhaust was pointing off the port side of the bow. Some area between the aircraft and the deck edge still remained, and one flight-deck crewman found out how dangerous this area is.

I was standing at the port wingtip when the yellowshirt gave the signal to insert chocks and tie down the jet. I watched a blueshirt move from the port side of the aircraft toward the starboard main mount, but she wasn't directly under the wing. In fact, she was headed straight for the exhaust.

Just as she crossed the port exhaust, she was blown down on the deck. I ran to grab her, pulling the blueshirt off the deck and out of jet exhaust's path. She kept trying to grab the chock she had dropped, but I wouldn't let her get it. The exhaust pushed the chock all the way to the deck-edge scupper, and the hot whirlwind would have taken her over the edge had I not intervened. She was a little shaken, but she was thankful another shipmate had helped out.

We are under the gun to reduce mishaps 50 percent, so when you're on the carrier deck, always be aware of your surroundings. Look out for other shipmates, and make sure they don't walk behind an aircraft's exhaust or put themselves in other danger. Look out for No. 1, also, because you could be blown off the flight deck and into the open sea. In this incident, the blueshirt was not hurt and walked away with only an injury to her pride. 

AME1(AW/SW) McKinzie works in the QA shop at VAQ-139.

By Ltjg. Rob Cassidy

I had had a good day as the air-wing safety duty officer: a few minor incidents but nothing serious. My comfort zone was shattered early that night when one of our AEs was injured on the flight deck. I was notified of the incident and was called to write an initial report on the facts.

It was a night like any other after a month at sea. The deck and crews were beginning to get into a solid rhythm. The ship and air-wing team was becoming a model of efficiency. But this night would not remain routine.


While an S-3 was taxiing from its parking spot in the landing area to cat 3 for launch, the

wheels became stuck in the arresting wires. In an effort to taxi free of the wires, the crew added power and taxied through.

Maintainers positioned themselves for final checks, but one AE2 shifted position and found out why you must maintain situational awareness at all times on the flight deck. He walked behind his aircraft just as the crew in the Viking increased engine power. He was blown backward, toward the round down, and stopped only when he collided with a parked tow tractor.

His clash with the tow tractor ended with lacerations and a broken femur. The bone broke clean through. He was flown off the carrier the next day and eventually was sent home to heal.

Several things could have been done differently to avoid this unfortunate mishap. The maintainer should have been aware of the danger brewing and waited to step behind the aircraft. He also underestimated the power of an S-3's exhaust and assumed it would not blow him down. The taxi director's responsibility is to keep the area clear. He gave the crew the signal to power up, even though someone was in the blast area. The aircrew could have told the Air Boss that they needed to come up on power in the wires—even though no requirement exists to tell him. The Boss has tremendous situational awareness and the 5MC, and his involvement from the tower may have been enough to prevent the incident.

The biggest lesson learned is talked about and constantly reviewed, but it often is ignored: Sailors must maintain situational awareness on the flight deck at all times. They must "see" an unsafe situation ready to develop before it becomes a real danger. 

Ltjg. Cassidy flies with VS-30.

Injury on the Flight Deck